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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Checking up on the fruit and vegetable market

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A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wells Sherman, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, broadcast Wednesday, February 27, 1935, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by NBC and a network of 50 associate radio stations.

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MR. SALISEURY: Once again the Household Calendar, with our good friend, Ruth Van Deman. And I see she has with her another of our good friends, Mr. Wells A. Sherman. When those two put their heads together it generally means one of those racy reviews of the fruit and vegetable market. Am I right, Miss Van Deman?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Absolutely! I've been on Mr. Sherman's trail ever since he came back from the South. I knew he'd have a lot of good first-hand news for us family marketeers. Mr. Sherman, haven't the snap beans staged a remarkable come-back since that cold wave struck them? I read in the paper yesterday that green beans are actually on the list of fresh vegetable bargains.

MR. SHERMAN: Not exactly a comeback. A bean vine once frozen is gone forever. But the price of snap beans has shot up and down like a sky-rocket this winter. The freeze in Florida in December wiped out the crop there for the time being. I was in the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas at the time. Every farmer there who had an old patch of beans went out and picked all the left overs. The prices shot up over night, and the dealers had orders for anything that looked like a snap bean. Some of the beans that traveled North on the crest of that boom were more string beans than snap beans.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, I remember some of those stringy string beans. But the beans in the market now are tender and fine. No strings in them. Where are they coming from?

MR. SHERMAN: Florida. They've grown since the freeze. You know snap beans require only about 45 days from planting to picking. About 6 or 7 weeks after you plant the seed you can have snap beans ready to pick. The growers in Florida have a steady succession of beans coming along through the winter. For 3 months or so they plant beans every week. So a day or two after the frost hit the crop in December, new plants began pricking through the ground, and of course the growers began at once to plow under the damaged crop and replant.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And now we're reaping the harvest of those plantings.

MR. SHERMAN: Exactly.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, spinach and green peas seem to be plentiful and reasonable in price also; but new cabbage is high and so is broccoli.

MR. SHERMAN: Yes, Texas had her troubles this winter as well as Florida. Just about a month after the Florida freeze, a cold wave struck the truck section of the whole Gulf Coast - Louisiana as well as Texas. The mercury dropped way down, and in Texas a biting wind blew from the north. The young cabbage plants were hard hit, and the whole cabbage crop was badly

damaged. Not much of the spinach was killed outright. Spinach can stand a lot of cold, but the outer leaves turn yellow after a freeze, and it takes some time for the plants to put out tender new leaves.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Don't the Texas growers plant one crop of spinach and cabbage right after another the way the Florida people do with their beans?

MR. SHERMAN: Oh yes, but it takes longer to grow a cabbage head than it does a snap bean.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Where are these nice green peas coming from that are in the market now? I'm old-fashioned I guess, but it still seems queer to me to see big baskets of June peas in February.

MR. SHERMAN: Well, if you were down on the West Coast of Mexico or in the Imperial Valley in California basking in the sunshine, you'd think that it was June.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Is that where the green peas are coming from?

MR. SHERMAN: Yes. Mexico and California are our sources of fresh green peas in winter. They're growing peas now even as far north as the Sacramento Valley. Texas and Florida growers don't go in heavily for winter peas.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, speaking of Florida again, what about the effect of the freeze on the oranges down there? I see lots of Florida oranges in the market.

MR. SHERMAN: Yes. Florida is shipping lots of oranges. You see a freeze has this effect on citrus fruit. It bursts the juice cells in the fruit so that they dry out. Sometimes this injury is progressive. The longer frozen fruit hangs on the tree, the drier it gets. As you probably know, under ordinary circumstances the best place to store oranges and grapefruit is on the trees, not in cold storage rooms.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, I understand that's the way it's done in the best orange groves.

MR. SHERMAN: Well, the danger is that a lot of the fruit this spring will be so dry that it will be illegal to ship it. So the growers are picking and shipping their oranges now as fast as the market will take them. This is keeping prices down, but it may mean that by the end of the season good Florida oranges will be scarce and higher in price.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, the Florida oranges I've had seem to be as sweet as ever.

MR. SHERMAN: Yes, a little freezing does not necessarily reduce the sweetness or injure the flavor of an orange. It usually just means a little loss of juice.

MISS VAN DEMAN: What about grapefruit, Mr. Sherman? Does the feast we're having now mean a famine on them later?

MR. SHERMAN: No. That's putting it too strong. Grapefruit haven't been damaged so much as oranges by the cold weather in the South this winter. Grapefruit are thicker skinned than oranges. They can stand the cold better. In spite of the freezes in Texas and Florida, most of the grapefruit crop is coming to market.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, I'm especially glad that those good Texas grapefruit will be coming along. They're my idea of super-grapefruit - mild and full of juice and so tender it's a pleasure to put a spoon into them. And I like the new pink-fleshed grapefruit. They add a new note of color to the menu.

MR. SHERMAN: And speaking of color, have you noticed the strawberries recently?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, I have. I saw the street vendors selling strawberries on Connecticut Avenue yesterday - beautiful looking deep red berries.

MR. SHERMAN: Yes. And they taste better than usual. Those were Florida berries.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Then the strawberries have made a real come-back since the freeze.

MR. SHERMAN: Yes. The strawberries in Florida have bloomed again since the freeze. In fact all along the Gulf Coast a winter freeze merely seems to set back the strawberry crop. If the first blooms are killed the plants send up new fruit stems and bloom again. This seldom happens in the latitude of Washington or further north. If our strawberries up here get frostbitten the crop is gone for the year.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That must be why we have Florida strawberries for months, and home-grown berries come and go in two or three weeks.

MR. SHERMAN: Yes, that's the reason.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, Miss Van Deman, I've stood this talk about strawberries just as long as I can. When does the strawberry shortcake season open? That's what I want to know.

MISS VAN DEMAN: It's open now. Time to call the roll on all good makers of strawberry shortcake, biscuit dough variety.

MR. SALISBURY: You bet.

